

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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R 132201Z AUG 74

FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1222

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTO DOMINGO 3342

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, DR

SUBJECT: AUGUST 12 SANTO DOMINGO STRIKES

1. ON AUGUST 12, AN OPPOSITION-ORGANIZED STRIKE DESIGNED TO CLOSE THE THREE MAJOR SHOPPING DISTRICTS OF SANTO DOMINGO SUCCESSFULLY SHUT DOWN VIRTUALLY ALL OF THE ACTIVITIES OF 2 OF THE DISTRICTS IN THE CENTER OF THE CITY.

2. THERE WAS LITTLE VIOLENCE INVOLVED WITH THE STRIKE UNTIL GOVERNMENT-ORGANIZED ANTI-STRIKE BANDS ATTEMPTED TO FORCE OPEN THE STORES WHICH HAD CLOSED BY BREAKING IN THEIR DOORS AND WINDOWS. THESE BANDS MOVED FREELY IN THE AFFECTED ZONES--WHICH WERE HEAVILY GUARDED BY POLITCE AND MILITARY PATROLS--UNTIL A PRESS RELEASE FROM THE NATIONAL PALACE CONFIRMED THAT PRESIDENT BALAGUER WANTED THE STRIKEBREAKERS ARRESTED AND PUNISHED. AT THIS POINT RELATIVE CALM RETURNED TO THE STRIKING AREAS.

3. THE GENERAL PRESS REACTION TO THE STRIKES WAS NEGATIVE, BUT THE MOST STRONGLY WORDED PRESS CRITICISM WAS DIRECTED AT THE GOVERNMENT-TOLERATED STRIKEBREAKERS. PRESTIGIOUS LISTIN DIARIO'S AUGUST 13 EDITORIAL WAS TYPICAL; IT CHARACTERIZED THE STRIKES AS ESSENTIALLY OF NUISANCE VALUE, UNDERTAKEN FOR CLEARLY PARTISAN POLITICAL ENDS, BUT ACCUSED THE STRIKEBREAKERS OF TURNING THEM INTO SOMETHING "OF A CRISIS FOR THE GOVERNMENT."

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4. THE RELATIVE SUCCESS OF THE STRIKES REPORTEDLY HAS BEEN VERY ENCOURAGING TO THE SANTIAGO ACCORD, WHICH IS REDOUBLING ITS EFFORTS TO BRING ABOUT THE "DAYS OF SILENCE" WHICH THE ACCORD HAS DECLARED FOR AUGUST 15 AND 16. MOREOVER, THERE ARE INSISTENT RUMORS THAT THE OPPOSITION IS NOW CONSIDERING A GENERAL STRIKE AT SOME TIME IN THE COMING WEEK OF AUGUST 19-25.

5. COMMENT: SHOULD THE OPPOSITION MOVE AHEAD WITH ITS PLANS FOR DAYS OF SILENCE (ALMOST CERTAIN) AND A GENERAL STRIKE (LESS LIKELY), THEIR EFFECTIVENESS WILL DEPEND ON THE COMBINATION OF COERCION BY BOTH SIDES AND REAL GRIEVANCES WHICH CAUSED THE AUGUST 12 STRIKE TO SUCCEED. STORE OWNERS WHO ARE ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY INFLATION AND INADEQUATE SUPPLY OF WATER AND LIGHT, AND WHO MIGHT THEREFORE VOLUNTARILY STRIKE, WILL AGAIN HAVE THIS INCLINATION ENFORCED BY THE THREATS OF DAMAGE TO THEIR STORES, IF THEY DO NOT SUPPORT THE STRIKE.

6. THE GOVERNMENT-ORGANIZED STRIKEBREAKERS' OVERLY ENERGETIC REACTION TO THE CLOSING OF THE SHOPPING DISTRICTS WAS CLEARLY A SERIOUS MISTAKE. THE QUITE SUCCESSFUL EQUANIMITY WITH WHICH THE GODR HAD TREATED EARLIER STRIKES WAS APPARENTLY DISREGARDED BY SOME OF THE GOVERNMENT'S LESS THOUGHTFUL SUPPORTERS. PRESIDENT BALAGUER'S NOONDAY DENUNCIATION OF THE STRIKES CALMED THE SITUATION, HOWEVER. HURWITCH

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